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Engagement

Building a Shared Vision

TAKING DOWNTOWN'S PULSE

The Downtown planning process involved hundreds of hours in meetings with the general public and important stakeholders to ensure that the Downtown master plan reflected their goals and earned their strong support. This enormous and sustained investment of time and ideas by the people of Wichita over more than a year is central to the quality of the plan and the best predictor of successful, ongoing implementation.

Stakeholder meetings framed issues and opportunities—and gave life to thoughtful Downtown reinvestment concepts even before completion of the plan. Stakeholders interviewed early in the planning process included property and business owners, developers, churches, Downtown residents, young professionals, elected officials, and City and County staff among others. The interviews, coupled with research into

issues involving markets, transportation, and existing development patterns, emphasized the challenges and opportunities listed in the boxes on pages 3.2–3.3.

CULTIVATING GREAT INVESTMENTS DOWNTOWN

Ongoing meetings with property owners, business owners and developers throughout the planning process made some development concepts already under way better, sparked discussion of new development concepts, and helped make the plan more responsive to specific opportunities and more realistic in its implementation strategies. People advancing or considering reinvestment in Downtown properties and businesses valued the data, predictability and leadership that emerged from the planning process. Even before completion or formal adoption of the plan, its emerging concepts helped generate “win-win” outcomes in which individual projects



Projects that benefited from coordination and new thinking as a result of the planning process include the Cargill Innovation Center, shown far left in the early stages of construction; the Marriott Fairfield Inn under construction at WaterWalk (center); and the former Coleman factory site, acquired for conversion to a public park and parking.

(and Downtown as a whole) benefited significantly from coordination, typically at little or no real cost to the project sponsors. Examples include Cargill's Innovation Center and the Fairfield Inn at WaterWalk, as well as Sedgwick

Downtown's Challenges...

- People in the region express a **wide range of perceptions** of downtown's value to their quality of life and that of the overall region.
 - > Some feel that too much public money has been spent on downtown with too little benefit within downtown and to the larger taxpaying public.
 - > Some (such as teens) simply don't find downtown relevant to their lives today—there's no reason to go there.
 - > Some express great enthusiasm about downtown as a place where they live, do business, dine, find entertainment, attend festivals etc.
 - > Some residents of other Wichita neighborhoods and the region value a more vibrant downtown.
- **Property ownership patterns** hinder development. Downtown property ownership tends to be highly disaggregated across individual blocks. In addition, many properties involve decades-old ground leases held by multiple heirs to original owners, making property aggregation and joint action by multiple owners especially challenging.
- **"Tired old buildings"** need new economic life. Many older buildings Downtown struggle to compete for the small market for Class B/C office space. Some lack the physical characteristics, convenient parking, or potential rate of return that would justify rehabilitation as higher-quality office space or housing.
- **Securing funding for downtown development is a challenge.** At times, limited availability of historic tax credits has constrained opportunities to finance more rehabilitation. Limited interest by national lenders further restricts opportunities for new construction and rehabilitation. Public funding assistance faces intense public scrutiny and skepticism. The significant public and institutional incentive programs that do exist need to be more accessible, targeted, and effective.
- **Automobile-focused transportation and development patterns** have eroded downtown's intrinsic qualities. Most downtown streets are designed more for drivers than people walking, biking or taking transit. Most downtown buildings from the last half-century—and their associated parking facilities—are geared to the experience of arriving by car, not by foot. While good auto access will remain critical to downtown's success, a better environment for pedestrians will be essential to unlocking downtown's unique value as a place where many activities and people come together regularly in a compact area.

County's enhancements of the former Coleman factory site. Similar conversations with stakeholders sowed seeds for future projects. This fruitful process of stakeholder engagement exemplified efforts that should continue through implementation of the plan, to encourage two-way discussions between entrepreneurs with development concepts and private- and public-sector Downtown leadership with advice on how to reinforce the success of individual projects and Downtown as a whole.

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY

Seven major public events over ten months enabled the Wichita community to share its appreciation of, concerns about, and aspirations for Downtown and to critique pieces of the emerging Downtown plan. Presentations and public input from these events can be found online at www.downtownwichita.org/.

- **IMAGERY, December 4-5, 2009**

A "walk-shop" opened the community-engagement process with an opportunity to observe and discuss Downtown's strengths and weaknesses as a place for walking. Participants braved frigid conditions to take self-guided walking tours of Downtown and record their impressions with annotated photos gathered in real time for group discussion and for posting into an online photo album (www.flickr.com/photos/walkshops/). During the culminating walk-shop event, participants discussed opportunities and challenges for retail storefronts, parks, transit, streetscape design, and similar elements that shape how much Downtown invites people to walk. They then

...and Its Opportunities

- **Businesses like being downtown.** Major employers are firmly grounded downtown due to its centrality, identity, access to workforce, adjacency to supportive businesses/institutions—including hotels and restaurants—and similar factors. The flight of office tenants to the suburbs has clearly stopped, and demand for more high-end office space downtown is solid. Most downtown retailers and restaurants are prospering.
- **People like living downtown.** There has been consistent demand for downtown housing since more has become available at places like Old Town and the Garvey Center. There is further market demand for about 1,000 more units over the next 5 to 7 years, doubling the current stock.
- **Visitors like staying in downtown hotels.** Strong occupancy and revenue rates at hotels and a relative undersupply of rooms compared to office space suggest a market opportunity for more hotel rooms. Downtown's sense of place, highly accessible central location, convention center, business presence, and regionally unique options for dining, entertainment and culture make it a logical magnet for visitors.
- **Downtown has the infrastructure to support growth.** Downtown streets tend to be relatively wide and have ample capacity: there are no substantive problems with traffic capacity. There is room for improved infrastructure that supports walking, transit and biking. The city is actively pursuing an integrated system to develop and operate downtown parking infrastructure that could unlock important development opportunities. Significant parklands along the Arkansas River have potential to serve the community much more than they do today.
- **Downtown offers unparalleled cultural amenities.** Downtown's museums, performing arts, sports venues and places of learning constitute the greatest collection and highest quality of such resources in the region and state. They matter to the many Wichita businesses that attract national visitors, to conventions that come to Wichita, and to residents of the city and region. With enhanced presence and support for operations and facilities, they will become ever stronger assets for the regional economy and quality of life.
- **The Arkansas River provides a unique sense of place—and value.** The Keeper of the Plains embodies the city's connection to the river, from ancient times to the present. People consistently cite the river as central to Wichita's identity. The river promises great, yet largely untapped value as a living and business address, recreational amenity, and community gathering place.
- **Other initiatives hold tremendous potential** to catalyze further improvements if conceived and coordinated effectively:
 - > The new INTRUST Bank Arena
 - > Residential lofts, including Flats 324 and Finn Lofts
 - > Additional office and residential rehabilitation projects along Douglas Avenue, such as Exchange Place
 - > New Fairfield Inn at WaterWalk
 - > New main public library and complementary mixed-use development
 - > Commerce Street Arts District initiative
 - > Broadview Hotel renovations and associated riverfront improvements
 - > Downtown employment and office space growth by Airbus, Cargill, and others
 - > New YMCA
 - > Kansas Health Foundation focus on public health benefits of walking, biking and recreation
 - > First Street performing arts district concept
 - > Near- and long-term improvements at the Century II Performing Arts and Convention Center
 - > Wichita Art Museum improvement/development concepts
 - > Reorganization and expansion of city bus routes to offer more convenient options
 - > Potential for inter-city rail service at Union Station
 - > Other initiatives



A December 2009 “walk-shop,” whose participants documented downtown walkability, launched a series of seven public events that engaged hundreds of Wichitans in evaluating downtown today and developing a vision for its future.

categorized images and used personal keypad polling devices to create a series of priority statements about Downtown’s walkability. The Wichita Flickr photography group organized supplementary photo shoots of more Downtown areas.

- **DISCOVERIES, January 13, 2010**

This public meeting unveiled fresh research into market-



The meeting on January 13, 2010, focused on research into market potential that can drive new development downtown.

based development opportunities that represent the most effective engines for Downtown growth. Nationally-recognized experts in relevant fields shared the conclusions documented in

Chapter 2, A New Era of Opportunity:

- > Laurie Volk of Zimmerman/Volk Associates profiled Wichita’s Downtown housing market.
- > Sarah Woodworth of W-ZHA described existing and potential demand in the office and hotel markets.

> Mike Berne of MJB Consulting discussed the retail market.

A panel of local development and real estate professionals responded to the three speakers’ findings; Goody Clancy shared community input from the Walk-shops; and participants completed a survey ranking Downtown opportunities and challenges.

- **PROGRESSIVE, February 25 and 27, 2010**

On Thursday, February 25, Jim Cloar delivered WDDC’s annual guest lecture. Cloar drew on 30 years of direct experience with downtown organizations in major U.S. cities to explain how downtown management made a significant difference in the livability and prosperity of St. Louis, Tampa, and Dallas.

On Saturday February 27, the Wichita Art Museum hosted an all-day community “charrette”—a public workshop dedicated to informed brainstorming a 20-year vision for Downtown. The day began with presentations on important background information: Yolanda Takesian of Kittelson Associates shared transportation analysis; Mike Berne of MJB Consulting shared updated retail market

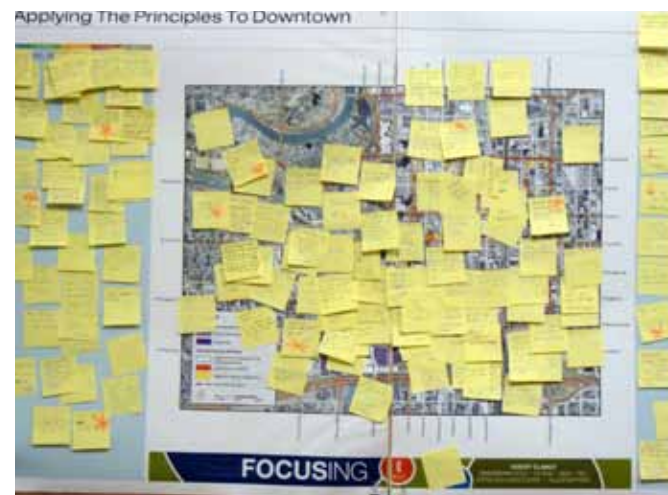


The February 27 charrette focused on the components of a vision for downtown Wichita, from the kinds of stores downtown should try to attract to the kinds of development that current and projected market demand would support.

research; David Dixon of Goody Clancy presented urban design principles for placemaking; and Scott Dunakey of PEC described Wichita's new streetscape design guidelines. Participants then divided into groups to outline priority principles that they felt should inform Downtown's urban design, transportation, management, development process, and retail offerings. At lunch, participants used keypad polling to rank statements describing Downtown and completed a survey on transportation issues. In the afternoon, eight groups created Downtown vision models using maps, markers and foam blocks representing 15 years' worth of market-based development opportunity. The day concluded with an open house where participants shared the results with a broader public audience.

• **FOCUSING, April 28, 2010**

The vision for Downtown began to emerge at this public meeting. David Dixon introduced five draft vision principles, each with five supporting components, that evolved into the principles in Chapter 4, The Downtown Vision. Sarah Woodworth demystified development economics with explanations of what it costs to develop a building Downtown—and what key financing tools can help make new development happen. Goody Clancy's Ben Carlson presented a framework that organizes new development around street corridors that emphasize high-quality walking and transit access, and conducted a tour of existing and emerging districts



At the April meeting, participants filled boards with site-specific comments on applying the five principles to downtown.

and neighborhoods that make up Downtown, illustrated with photos of precedents from other downtowns. Participants ranked vision principle statements arrayed on posters.



- **TRANSFORM, June 14-16, 2010**

Hundreds of people crowded the Scottish Rite Center on June 14 to see the draft plan for Downtown. Yolanda Takesian presented the Downtown transportation plan, with emphasis on expanded Q-Line transit services. Sarah Woodworth shared new criteria for guiding decisions on when to invest public incentive funds in private development projects. Ben Carlson presented before/after photo-renderings to illustrate a series of Downtown places transformed with new market-based development and reinvigorated public spaces, and then the action strategies to make the illustrative concepts real (Chapter 6, Action Steps). Participants identified priority implementation actions in different areas of Downtown and completed a survey assessing the plan's coverage of key issues.

Three themed workshops on June 16 allowed more in-depth public presentation and discussion of the draft plan. Each workshop placed special emphasis on a single topic: development economics, transportation, and urban design/placemaking.

- **Neighborhood Community Outreach Meetings, July 7-21, 2010**

The City, WDDC, and Visioneering took the draft plan to



a broader community audience in a series of eight meetings held in Wichita neighborhoods and in Bel Aire,

Derby, and Haysville. Summary presentations of the draft plan were followed by an opportunity for participants to review and discuss plan concepts in small groups.

A workshop on July 20 focused specifically on the Commerce Street Arts District. Community members identified priority issues deserving attention during planning and engineering work for the area that brought master plan concepts to a very local level.



- **PROJECT DOWNTOWN, September 28, 2010**
This public open house in the lobby of the Bank of America Building on Douglas Avenue featured presentations of the final draft plan as well as an opportunity to speak with City and private-sector leaders who will implement the plan. The presentation featured demonstrations of how a series of action steps can bring about a sequence of constructive improvements in locations across Downtown.

In addition to these public events, the planning team made several public presentations of draft and final plan components to the Wichita City Council, Sedgwick County Commission, and the Planning Commission.

Strong coverage of the planning process by Wichita's print and broadcast media opened the Downtown plan conversation to a broader regional audience. The major public events drew television and newspaper coverage, and *The Wichita Eagle* and *Wichita Business Journal* each published a running series of articles on Downtown planning issues. The *Eagle's* particularly extensive coverage, including its own downtown research tours to peer cities, including Boise, Milwaukee, Baton Rouge, and Louisville, and coverage of Visioneering's city-to-city tours to Chattanooga (2009) and Louisville (2010), can be explored at www.kansas.com/downtown/.

